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INR WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS*

No. 16, August 2, 1977

TRANSFERRED TO OTHER AGENCY
CONCURRENCE REQUESTED - CIA

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina

Situation Report. On the eve of Human Rights Coordinator Derian's visit to Argentina, Embassy Buenos Aires summarized the local situation as follows:

--Suspected hard-core terrorists are systematically mistreated and eliminated. The incidence of such abuses should decline, however, as the counter-terrorist campaign winds down.

--In cases of low-level terrorists, measures have been implemented to curb the worst abuses. Special treatment is accorded those who surrender voluntarily, and greater numbers of cases are being processed in civilian and military courts.

--Attempts are being made to avoid excesses by tightening command and control over the counterterrorist operations and computerizing data on subversion suspects.

--President Videla has reportedly insisted that those charged with economic crimes be processed legally rather than treated as subversives.

The Embassy commented that the rights of a disturbing number of people continue to be violated as they become pawns in a domestic political struggle between moderate and hardline military elements. Unlike abuses in the battle against subversion, however, such human rights violations do not reflect unified government policy. (CONFIDENTIAL, Buenos Aires 5581, July 29)

Labor Purged. Government authorities have intensified efforts to purge what remains of the national labor union leadership. Many union bosses identified with the Isabel Peron administration either fled the country or were jailed after the March 24, 1976 coup. The current harassment and intimidation of those who retained their posts is designed to:

* This round-up covers countries receiving development or security assistance or likely to make FMS cash purchases.

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--punish them for embarassing the government by refusing to participate in the Argentine delegation to the June ILO conference; and

--prepare the way for a new generation of national union leaders.

INR Comment: Organized labor is predominantly Peronist and traditionally the nation's most powerful civilian political force. In the view of military leaders, the populist and demagogic policies that they consider responsible for past economic failures will reemerge with future civilian administrations unless the unions' political clout is circumscribed. Legislation with this end in mind has long been expected, and the timing of the current purge may have been dictated by a desire to inhibit labor's ability to respond in a nationally organized fasion. The national union leadership was so discredited by its pre-March 1976 performance that its forced departure is unlikely to provoke a strong domestic reaction unless union leaders are subjected to severe physical mistreatment. (CONFIDENTIAL, Buenos Aires 5526, July 28)

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